

THE ECOLOGICAL WORLDVIEWS AND POST-CONVENTIONAL ACTION LOGICS OF GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY LEADERS

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ABSTRACT

This is an empirical study of ecological worldviews and action logics of global sustainability leaders. Although a body of research has emerged in recent years focused on corporate sustainability practices at the organizational level, the literature has paid less attention to corporate sustainability at the individual level. As a result, little is known about the deeper psychological motivations of sustainability leaders and how these motivations may influence their behavior and effectiveness as change agents.

This study was based on theoretical insights from several social science disciplines including ecopsychology, integral ecology, environmental sociology, and developmental psychology. Drawing on interviews with 65 leaders in more than 50 multinational corporations, NGOs, and consultancies, the study presents three major propositions that illuminate specific ways that ecological worldviews and action logics are developed and expressed by sustainability leaders. Findings include 5 experiences that shape ecological worldviews over the lifespan and 6 ways that post-conventional action logics are expressed by sustainability leaders. Findings also include how the complexity of sustainability is driving highly collaborative approaches to leadership. Insights from this research can be integrated into leadership development programs in a range of public and private institutions and will be of interest to a range of sustainability scholars, social science researchers, sustainability executives, and social entrepreneurs.

Key Words: Sustainability leader, ecological worldviews, action logics, eco-psychology, developmental theory, new ecological paradigm, ecological self, corporate sustainability